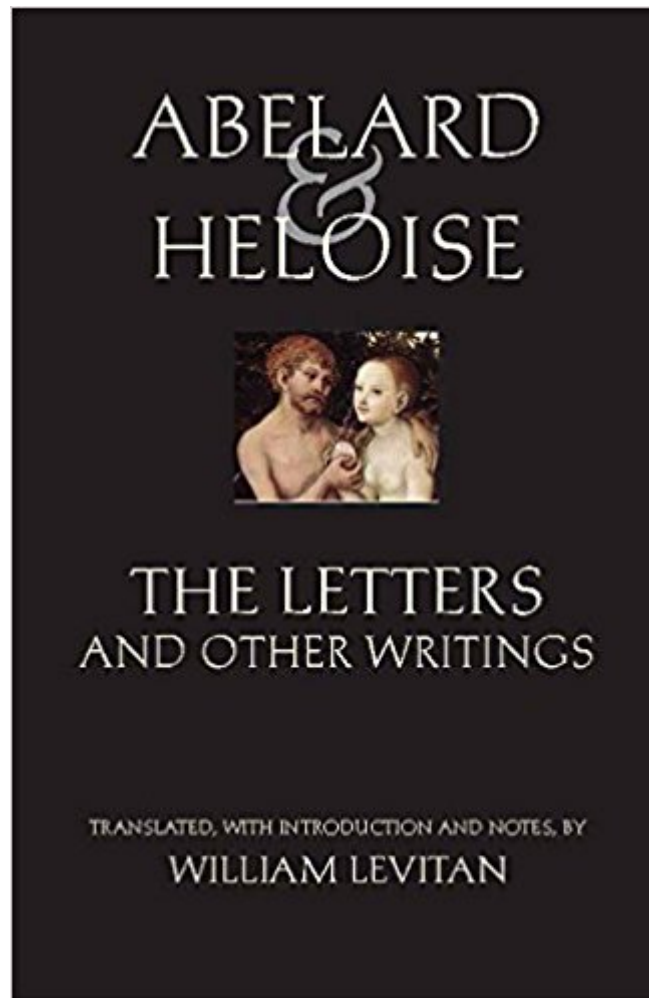




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# Abelard And Heloise: The Letters And Other Writings (Hackett Classics)



## Synopsis

The most comprehensive compilation of the works of Abelard and Heloise ever presented in a single volume in English, *The Letters and Other Writings* features an accurate and stylistically faithful new translation of both *The Calamities of Peter Abelard* and the remarkable letters it sparked between the ill-fated twelfth-century philosopher and his brilliant former student and lover. It can exchange whose intellectual passion, formal virtuosity, and psychological drama distinguish it as one of the most extraordinary correspondences in European history. Thanks to this edition, Latin-less readers will be better placed than ever to see why this undisputed milestone in the intellectual life of medieval France is also a masterpiece of Western literature. In addition to the *The Calamities* and the letters--the first complete English translation of all seven in more than eighty years--this volume includes an Introduction, a map, and a chronology, Abelard's Confession of Faith, letters between Heloise and Peter the Venerable, the Introduction to *The Questions of Heloise*, and selected songs and poems by Abelard, among them a previously untranslated shaped poem, *Open Wide Your Eyes*. Extracts of lost letters sometimes ascribed to Abelard and Heloise are given in appendixes.

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## Customer Reviews

This text has a tremendous advantage over the Penguin: its introduction is geared to smart undergrads, its notes are precise and helpful, and its translations are really readable. Plus the book's design is eminently satisfying. This text exemplifies the best combination of deep erudition

and user/student-friendly features. I will use it again. --Louise M. Bishop, Clark Honors College, University of Oregon  
Levitan's fresh translations administer a series of productive shocks to the system. Nothing looks or sounds the same. . . . This will be a marvelous teaching text, and it deserves to enliven the syllabi of many, many courses. But it will also energize scholars. --Carol Symes, University of Illinois, in *The Medieval Review*  
This valuable translation of a major body of Medieval Latin prose and verse with extensive scholarly notes and appendices stands out for its comprehensive coverage of the Abelardian epistolary corpus. It offers the *Historia calamitatum*, the seven letters (all following the Muckle/McLaughlin edition and following their counting), the *Heloisae Problemata*, the confession (both from PL clxxviii), the letters of Peter the Venerable from and to Heloise (from Constable's edition), and a selection of the songs and poems (including the laments for the daughter of Jephtha and for Saul and Jonathan). . . . Exactly what is needed for the general reader. --Medium Aevum

The most comprehensive compilation of the works of Abelard and Heloise ever presented in a single volume in English, *The Letters and Other Writings* features an accurate and stylistically faithful new translation of both *The Calamities of Peter Abelard* and the remarkable letters it sparked between the ill-fated twelfth-century philosopher and his brilliant former student and lover -- an exchange whose intellectual passion, formal virtuosity, and psychological drama distinguish it as one of the most extraordinary correspondences in European history. Thanks to this edition, Latin-less readers will be better placed than ever to see why this undisputed milestone in the intellectual life of medieval France is also a masterpiece of Western literature. In addition to the *The Calamities* and the letters -- the first complete English translation of all seven in more than eighty years -- this volume includes an Introduction, a map, and a chronology, Abelard's Confession of Faith, letters between Heloise and Peter the Venerable, the Introduction to *The Questions of Heloise*, and selected songs and poems by Abelard, among them a previously untranslated "shaped" poem, "Open Wide Your Eyes." Extracts of "lost" letters sometimes ascribed to Abelard and Heloise are given in appendixes. "A welcome bundle of texts, in an English that seeks to recreate in its style the artful elegance of the originals." --Jan Ziolkowski, Department of Classics, Harvard University

Abelard & Heloise, *The Letters and other Writings*, Translated, with Introduction and Notes by William Levitan. I wish to offer this review as a rebuttal to the reviewer who thought it did not have much to offer aside from some of the poetry. To be sure, if one has a passing knowledge of the story

of Abelard and Heloise, you may expect something different from what is in this volume. All these letters were written after the fateful love affair and ad hoc castration of Abelard, when Abelard is a lecturer in theology at a monastery and Heloise was a prioress at a nearby Abby. Therefore, the lions share of text in the letters deals with matters of how to run a monastery. In that regard, they should be read in conjunction with St. Benedict's rule and Basil the Great's letters on the conduct in a monastery. When the early events in their life are brought up, they appear as object lessons of what not to do, as when Abelard writes, in the fourth letter: Consider then how appropriately God's justice - or rather, it was God's grace - dragged you against your will to the calling you were not afraid to mock, wanting you to atone for that desecration while wearing the same habit you once profaned, to answer the lie with the truth of the event and correct the falsehood of your pretense. Since our store of Abelard's writings in English is so thin, these letters often provide insights into his ethical and theological thoughts on atonement. One will also find evidence here for the feminists case (see especially Dr. Rita Nakashima Brock) that Abelard's atonement doctrines encourage pastors to preach submission to abuse of women and children (I am NOT saying this happens, only that such things are mentioned in feminist writings). One example which supports their case is: '...where there is struggle, there is also a crown: "No one is crowned who does not strive (2 Timothy 2:5) For me there is no crown, for there is no cause for strife, no grounds for struggle when the thorn of desire is gone.' Shortly afterwards, there is the line of Poetry: 'Afflict our flesh that you may preserve our souls.' There is a subtle dialectic here between theology and preaching. That Abelard 'preaches' the welcoming of suffering, does that mean his theology requires it. This seems like an abstruse subject, until you begin applying this dialectic to all those Roman clerics who shuffled around their priests who abused children. It suddenly becomes very modern. There is also a fair amount of social history here, as when Abelard discusses some of the abuses of monasteries who '...using hospitality as a pretext to set up building after building and turn the solitude they once sought into a city.' For those of us who are always on the lookout for 'new' liturgical material, I suggest that few things strike me as stronger than some of Abelard's 800 year old reverential poetry. Like Hildegard of Bingen, Abelard also wrote much liturgical music; however only a small sample finds its way into this book. I am a great fan of serendipity, so when the contents of a book surprises me, I relish it just a bit more. And, the quality of writing and relevance of topic makes this book worthy for all who examine the spiritual life from either the inside or the outside.

A superior translation and commentary. For the serious student or interested layperson of Medieval scholasticism and considering Abelard and Heloise, in particular, William

Levitan's effort is the most essential offered to date.

"Since there must never be the slightest cause for you to find fault with my obedience, a bridle has been set upon my words, although my grief itself is still untamed. Your order now is that I moderate myself and refrain at least from writing what is not difficult but impossible to guard against in speech."

~ Heloise If you are ordering this book to read the love letters of Abelard and Heloise you may be disappointed as I was. Yes, there are a few short romantic letters at the end of the book but they seem to only be an afterthought and might not even be the lost letters they claim to be. I think this book will appeal mostly to religious people who are also interested in the life of nuns in an abbey or monks in a monastery. Heloise asks Abelard for instructions for how she is to run an abbey and his replies are extensive and detailed. Their letters contain many biblical references as well as quotes from famous books they have read. They keep their correspondence very intellectual and instead of writing to each other as lovers, they focus on their responsibilities to God and a higher divine form of love. To give some background to the letters, the book begins with "The Calamities of Peter Abelard." This explains how Abelard and Heloise met and what exactly transpired between them. "Nothing is less in our power than the heart, which is more apt to command us than to obey. And so when the heart's passions rouse us, no one can contain their sudden surge of pressure and keep them from having their effects." ~ Heloise From this book I can only guess at how Heloise and Abelard managed to be so in love and yet separated for what must have seemed like an eternity. Abelard admits that his attraction to Heloise was at first merely lust and not a pure love like Christ's love. While some may say that Abelard never loved Heloise I think that he ended up loving her more as a sister in Christ. This deeper love is evident in his more spiritual letters, which do not contain the longing that Heloise seems to display. ~ The Rebecca Review

William Levitan's translation of Abelard's "History of my Calamities" and Abelard and Heloise's "Letter" easily supersedes previous translations of these fascinating twelfth-century texts. In an eminently readable translation, Levitan makes accessible the primary documents of one of the most captivating love affairs of the Middle Ages. From my own experience, this text is fabulous for classroom use, quickly getting students excited and involved in medieval thought, culture, and letters: cutting-edge theology, heart-breaking romance, shotgun weddings, gruesome castration, groundbreaking monasticism, gorgeous hymns -- this story has it all! See also Constant Mews's "The Lost Love Letters of Abelard and Heloise" (some of these, in translation, appear in an appendix of this edition) and Helen Waddell's fun novelization of the story, "Peter Abelard".

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